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AP Language 11

4/20/09

Sexual Orientation, Not Sexual Preference

In the discussion of gender roles, there is a large subcategory that deserves to be addressed, sexuality orientation. Sexual orientation is defined as by the American Psychological Association as “an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person’s sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions” (Sexuality). When discussing sexual orientation a common misnomer is used in its place, sexual preference. To refer to ones pattern or attractions as sex sexual preference is to imply that sexual orientation is something a person picks. This statement could not be farther from the truth, sexual orientation is not a choice. Sexual orientation, however, does not have one genetic or biological cause. Sexual orientation can be created by a number or biological and genetic factors, or by just one. The APA agrees with the above statement (Is Homosexuality a Choice?). Sexual orientation is biologically determined.

The reason for a person’s sexual orientation can, in part, be explained genetically. In 1995 a sample of mothers was taken; these women had their genomes mapped. Scientist wanted to find a correlation between the skewing of the X chromosomes to a woman giving birth to a homosexual son. Women have two X chromosomes; these are the chromosomes that are passed to the child during conception. One of which is “switched off.” The activation of the X chromosome throughout the embryo is random. Scientists believed that an overactive X chromosome could be one genetic cause of homosexuality in males. After all of the data was collected, scientist found that thirteen percent of women with extreme skewing had one homosexual son and twenty-three percent had two gay sons, this is compared the four percent to women who did not display extreme skewing but did produce homosexual male offspring (Bocklandt). This study shows that there is a link between homosexuality and a genetic phenomenon. Although the activation of the X chromosome may only account for the reason behind some men’s sexuality, there is still enough data to suggest that there are genetic links to homosexuality.

The Twin Study, aptly named because it studied the sexual orientation of twins, helps to prove that homosexuality is genetically determined. Scientists found that “studies of identical and fraternal twins suggest that there is a genetic influence on sexual orientation” (Belge). A study conducted in 1995 reported that in fifty-two percent of cases, if one male maternal twin was gay, then so was the other twin. This is compared to twenty-two percent of male paternal twins who shared a homosexual sexual preference. The study of female twins found that fourty-eight percent of identical twins were both homosexual while sixteen percent of female paternal twins were both lesbians (Belge). This research, like the X chromosome study, shows some link between homosexuality and a genetic deciding factor. The Twin Study, when paired with other research clearly supports the statement that homosexuality is not a choice.

Homosexuality is believed to be biologically determined, not exclusively genetic (Is Homosexuality a Choice?). The validity of this statement lies within the studies of brain structure. In 2003, scientists in the United Kingdom have found that homosexual individuals have a different brain structure then their heterosexual counterparts. The study used the MRIs of eighty people to map their brain formation. Of these eighty people, sixteen were gay males and fifteen were lesbians. Scientists found that lesbians have a structure that is very similar to that of heterosexual males. Straight males and lesbians shared a pattern of the distribution of grey matter (Lim). This investigation shows a strong biological reason for homosexuality in that people who are attracted to the same sex have similar brain structure.

Another study conducted by a Swedish physician shows more biological proof that homosexuality is not a choice. This experiment involved presenting the text subject, a person with a certain sexual preference, chemical pheromones. The subject then smelled the pheromones, and scientist mapped the reaction of the subject’s brain . Sixteen homosexual males, sixteen heterosexual males, and sixteen heterosexual women were presented with testosterone. The homosexual men and heterosexual women both responded strongly to the testosterone, while the heterosexual males displayed very little response (Lim). Because pheromones cause sexual arousal, it is clear that this study further proves that homosexuality is biologically determined; the subjects could not possibly choose how to react to the chemical pheromone.

Homosexuals are upset and angered by the accusations that these studies are inconclusive, as well as claims that their sexual orientation is a choice. Kevin Nelson is an eighteen-year-old openly homosexual male who is a senior at Corry High School. Kevin came out to his family and friends at the age of fifteen while in eighth grade. When asked whether he viewed homosexuality was a choice or a biologically determined phenomenon, Nelson said, “I definitely think it is biological. You are born gay. You don’t choose to be this way. I don’t know any homosexual who chooses to be gay just so he or she can go through all the harassment and grief from other people. You don’t choose to be tormented, just like you don’t choose to be gay” (Nelson). Many homosexuals firmly believe that their lifestyle is as Kevin says “the hand you were dealt” (Nelson). Kevin said that when he came out he was treated like a freak, like some changed person (Nelson). Many homosexual individuals share this experience. Why would an individual choose to subject themselves to torment?

The question remains, if scientific data, as well as homosexuals themselves both point to biological factors as a reason for sexual orientation, then how did the myth that sexuality is a choice come to be? I believe it is possible that this myth was started by people who disapprove of homosexuality, namely specific church and religious organizations. These people believe that homosexuality is morally wrong. In the minds of individuals against homosexuality if people choose to be homosexual then they can choose to be heterosexual. If this phenomenon is the case, then people who condemn homosexuality would benefit, because they could change the people who they criticize, homosexuals.

Based on overwhelming scientific data, combined with the thoughts and beliefs of homosexuals, sexual orientation is clearly not a choice. Sexual orientation, however, does not have one genetic or biological cause. Sexual orientation can be created by a number or biological and genetic factors, or by just one. One thing is clear though, homosexuals do not choose their sexual orientation. Why would anyone subject themselves to the torment and internal anguish that Kevin, like many other homosexuals, experience when they became open about their sexual orientation? No human being would choose to subject themselves to that.

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